Project management 101 *by Zavanak*

21. DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

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21.2 Identifying the problem

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Defining the problem

A poor problem definition is:

My computer isn't working.

A better problem definition is:

On start-up my computer (asset number) powers up but the screen remains blank. There is no sound.

This definition gives us something to work on. What the problem definition has described is a number of symptoms, and knowing those we can attempt to find the cause of those symptoms and start a process to solve the problem.

Effect → Investigation → Problem definition

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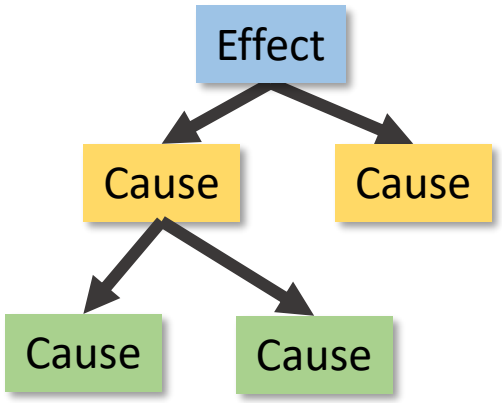
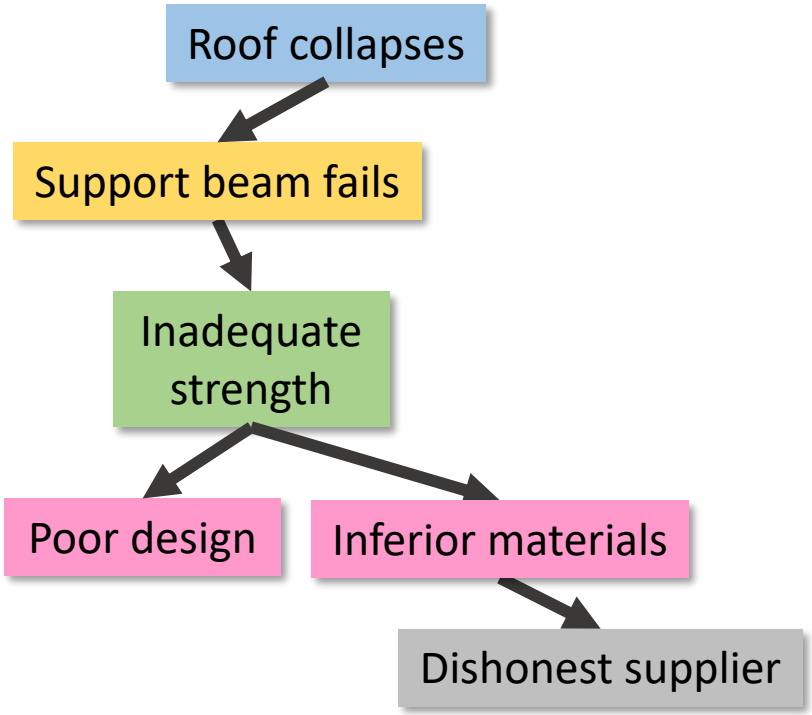
Cause-effect-cause analysis





Ask WHY five times

Effect	Investigation	Problem definition
Roof collapse	**Possible causes**	**How to reconstruct roof to carry specified load**

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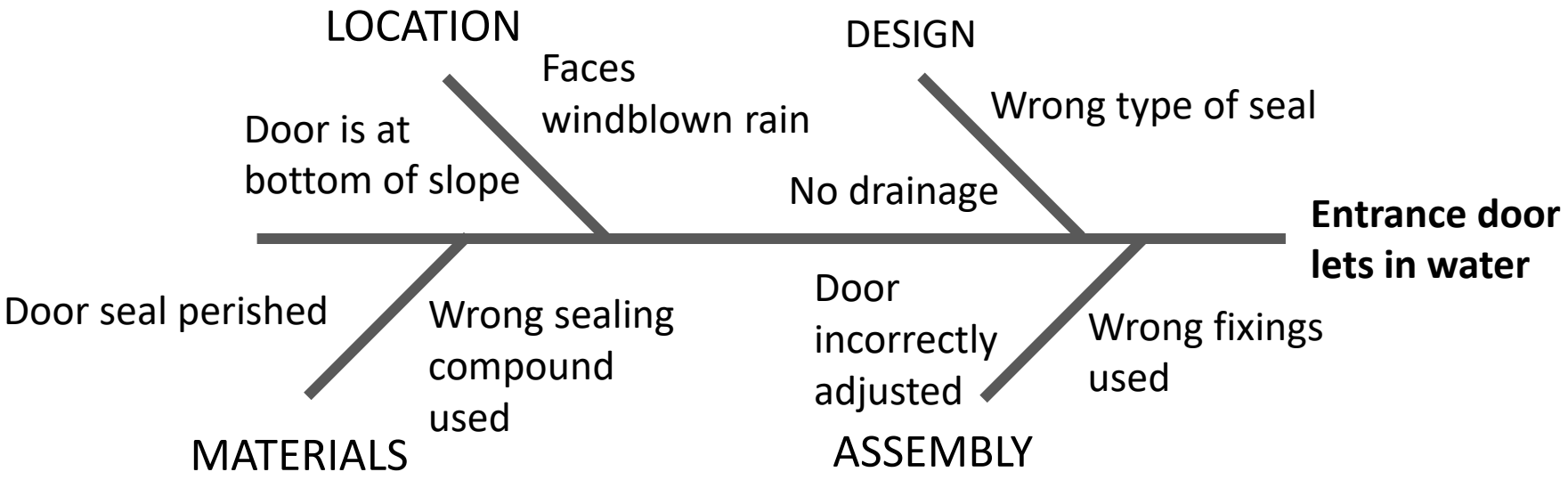
Ishikawa or fishbone diagram



Effect	Investigation	Problem definition
Leaking door	**Possible causes**	**Focus on what to fix**

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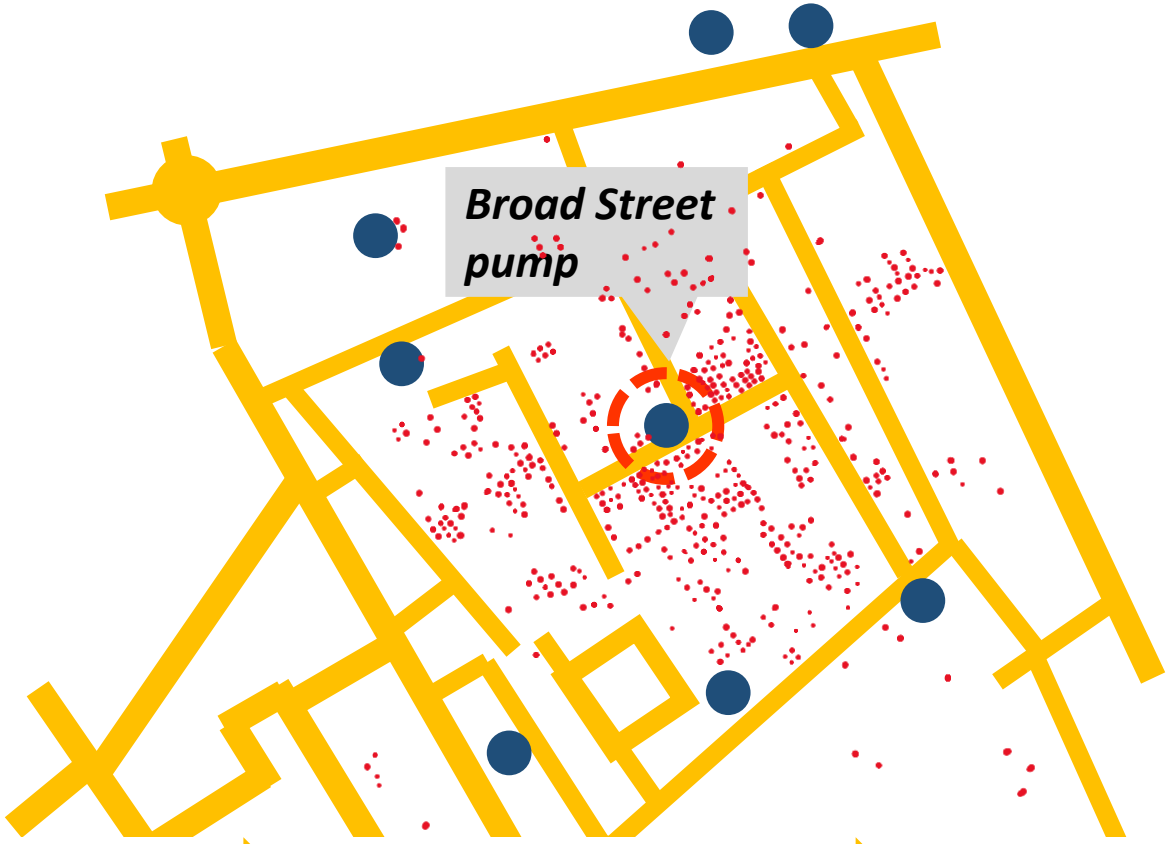
Revealing graphics



Dr John Snow, The Cholera Epidemic in London, 1854

Effect	Investigation	Problem definition
Cholera outbreak	**Possible causes**	**Stop infection spreading**

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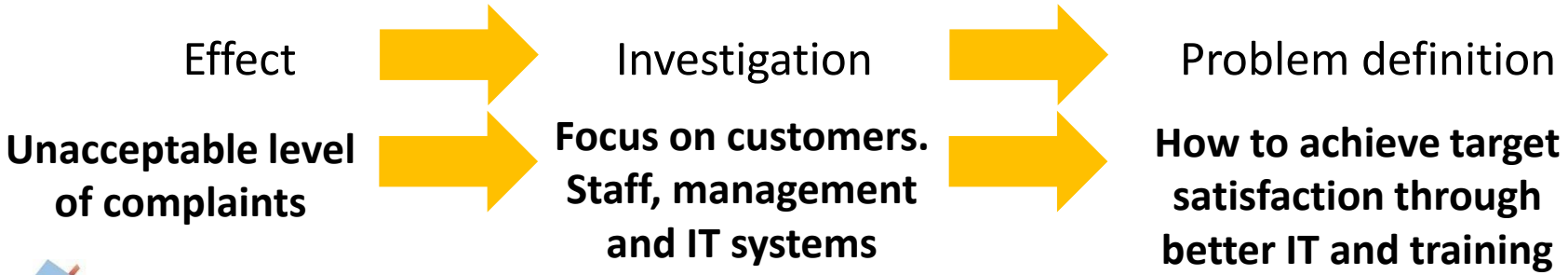
Primary research

Examine the environment where the problem has occurred.

- Interrogate relevant operational data, reports.
- **Interview people directly affected or involved about what they have experienced.**
- Make observations and take measurements to discover unacceptable variances.
- **Look at how organisation, equipment, contractual, environmental and other factors have a bearing on the problem.**



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